

I am writing this as President of the Rotary Club of La Crosse, Wisconsin – one of many personal activities. I understand the FCC is considering new regulations affecting how radio and television stations broadcast local issues programming and news, as well as how active they are in their communities.

I am a 60 year resident of La Crosse, Wisconsin. I currently serve as president of a 180+ member Rotary Club which includes a cross section of business and non-profit leaders from across the community, including members of at least three different minority groups. Our club also has its own charitable foundation. If I were to assess the state of community service by radio and television, it would be this: All of our local stations are very involved in their community service efforts. Frankly, radio could do a better job of news coverage, but television continues to shine on all levels.

When I think back 30 to 40 years, I can remember when there were over a dozen full time news reporters in the radio business, employed by three different AM-FM stations. The TV business in La Crosse consisted of one station (WKBT), plus two other network stations we could get with a rooftop antenna. Local news coverage was fair, in part due to the technology of the times. Radio could always beat television on fast-breaking news. Today the situation is reversed. Due, I think in part, to the FCC's assistance, media in the radio world has concentrated. Today in our city there is one full time news reporter, even though we have over a dozen local radio stations! TV, on the other hand, does a fantastic job of covering local news, with live breaking stories, community services coverage, and longer form public affairs programs on important local issues. WKBT which comes to mind first, has staged town meetings on youth alcohol consumption, crime in the community, political debates, and many other topics.

For the FCC to say radio and TV has lost touch with their communities is, at least in our area, very far from reality. I am active in several community organizations. In various capacities, I have occasion to work with radio and TV stations. Just next week I am meeting with management at one TV station, and one of our two main "radio groups". I am coordinating coverage of a local walk for Multiple Sclerosis. The stations give us excellent coverage, as they have for our 10 years, both in broadcasting PSAs, and in doing live on-air appearances by experts and patients. They also supply personnel the day of the walk to help entertain the crowd. I know I can pick up the phone and reach the senior management of any local station. As President of the Rotary, the General Managers of both the local CBS and ABC stations (we still don't have a local NBC in town) are members. The General Manager of one of the two main radio groups is a member.

Example: For years, the local ABC station has been the main “TV sponsor” for our MS Walk. Despite that, Scott Chorski, General Manager of WKBT, has made sure that his station also gives us on-air live interview time, even though they are not getting any sponsorship benefits from this. When the region last August (2007) was struck by horrible flash flooding that left seven persons dead and hundreds homeless, both local network stations and both main radio groups teamed up with many other members and within a couple days conducted a local fund drive the raised several hundred thousand dollars in one day. Both TV stations did much news coverage of subsequent events, including coverage of our Rotary Clubs efforts.

When our club staged a fund raising concert on fairly short notice last year, WKBT pitched in and helped produce a PSA to publicize the event, and aired it and helped promote the concert in other ways.

In sum, in terms of community service, and promotion of community projects, every station both radio and TV seems to have at least one promotional cause going at all times, all year long. I wish our local daily newspaper was as involved as our radio and TV folks. The top management of radio and TV stations interact “up close and personal” with dozens of business leaders every week. I know, because I watch three of them each Thursday at our Rotary Club. They listen, and they act. I am not a particularly important community figure. In my profession as financial advisor, I am not a local advertiser with any one of these businesses. I have never served in any elective office. Yet I can get right through to ownership or management at every level with no problem. I have suggested news coverage ideas to stations, and watched them do the stories. I have helped make connections for others who do not know these people personally, and I know they are always listened to, and treated well, and feel they have real input.

When I watch WKBT/CBS (my station of choice normally), I am more than satisfied that they cover all important aspects of our community. They are clearly in touch with community leaders of every stripe and persuasion, gender, and race. Their interest extends from news stories to having staff members get their hands dirty helping out. Just last week they taped a local community forum on underage drinking in cooperation with our local school district.

I would urge the FCC to take another look at these proposed regulations in light of middle-American reality. TV stations in my area are very in touch with their audiences, and serving them very well.